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Robyn Von Swank | Submitted photo

DOUG BENSON: Making his return to The Limestone Comedy Festival, comedian Doug Benson will be performing stand-up comedy, taping an

episode of his podcast, "Doug Loves Movies," and interrupting the movie "Hoosiers."



Mindy Tucker | Submitted photo

MICHAEL CHE: "Saturday Night Live" star Michael Che is set to perform two stand-up comedy sets June 6 at the Buskirk-Chumley Theater.



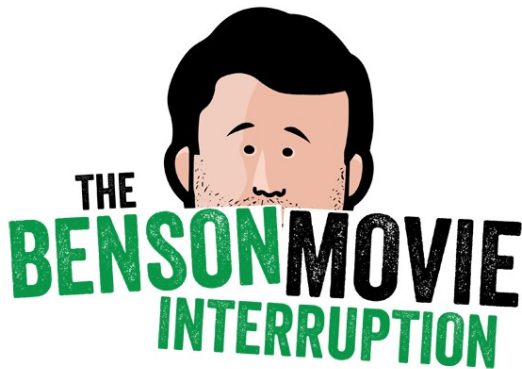
Submitted photo

JANEANE GAROFALO: Renowned actress and stand-up comedian Janeane Garofalo is set to open this year's festival.



Submitted photo

KYLE KINANE: The voice of Comedy Central, comedian Kyle Kinane has been announced as one of this year's headliners.



Submitted graphic

MOVIE, INTERRUPTED: This is not the first time Benson has invited fellow comedians to help him perform a running commentary while a classic Hoosier sports film has graced Bloomington's Buskirk-Chumley Theater. Two years ago he was joined by co-interrupters Graham Elwood, Jackie Kashian and Geoff Tate as "Breaking Away" played.

COMEDY FESTIVAL
JUNE 4-6, 2015 BLOOMINGTON, IN

SATURDAY
NIGHT

TOPM @ THE BACKDOOR
APARNA
NANCHERLA

Submitted graphic

SCHEDULE: This is the schedule which has been released for this year's edition of The Limestone Comedy Festival in Bloomington.

Limestone Comedy Festival: Volume III

Janeane Garofalo, Doug Benson, Kyle Kinane and Michael Che to headline

By Rob Burgess
Tribune night editor

BLOOMINGTON - For the third year in a row, The Limestone Comedy Festival will bring a cadre of top-flight comedic talent to Bloomington. And that's what keeps Jared Thompson, festival co-director and proprietor of The Comedy Attic, up at night: Meeting the exceptionally high expectations set by the past two years.

"We've got a lot of work to do in the audience's eyes," he said. "To have presented the comedians we brought the first two years, we've kind of dug ourselves a hole here, to be honest. We have a lot to live up to."

He's not kidding. The inaugural festival featured Tig Notaro, Maria Bamford and Pete Holmes. And last year, Patton Oswalt, Jimmy Pardo and Emo Philips graced the stage of the Buskirk-Chumley Theater.

"We definitely had some challenges," said Thompson, of scheduling this year's headliners. "But if you would have told me last August that this was the line-up I was going to have I wouldn't have believed you."

This year's festival is scheduled to take place June 4 to 6 at various locations in downtown Bloomington, and will begin with a performance by renowned actress and comedian Janeane Garofalo. Also slated to fill headlining spots are Kyle Kinane, the voice of Comedy Central; Michael Che, of "Saturday Night Live" and "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart" fame; and Doug Benson, who also co-headlined the first festival two years ago.

Local comedians and those who aspire to the profession will also be featured at the annual Blooming10 Showcase and the Ivy Tech Comedy Class Graduation Show, respectively. Thompson said the chance to showcase this homegrown talent holds a special place for him.

"The local comedy scene in Bloomington means more to me than anything else that has to do with comedy," said Thomspson. "It's easily head and shoulders my favorite part of doing this."

PODCASTS

From its inception, The Limestone Comedy Festival has integrated the emerging art form of podcasts into its line-up. This year is no different as episodes of "Arguments & Grievances," "Weird Adults with Little Ester" and more are scheduled. During his last appearance at the festival, Benson recorded an episode of one of his podcasts, "Dining with Doug and Karen," at The Comedy Attic. This time around, Benson is recording an installment of his long-running show, "Doug Loves Movies."

"[I] haven't done the movie podcast in Bloomington for a while," said Benson. "I'm excited because there's a great batch of comics at the festival for me to choose from."

Thompson has been a guest on "Doug Loves Movies" several times during Benson's previous visits to The Comedy Attic.

"It's about as much fun as you can have," he said. "Because I'm not on stage, that's the only time I really get a kind of rush."

Thompson is an unabashed movie lover and will go to the mattresses if another guest – or, even Benson – wrongly evaluates a film in his eyes.

"I've been in an argument with Doug during the show," he said. "And it's nothing bad, but we disagreed on a movie, I think it was 'Drive.' Movies are such a passion for me, that in that moment you don't even realize that I'm talking to Doug Benson, somebody you would never really think to argue with, especially in public."

INDIANA MOVIES, INTERRUPTED

Anyone who attended the first festival two years ago will most likely have the same answer as to the highlight of the weekend. It occurred when during the so-called "Benson Movie Interruption" when Doug was joined by co-interrupters Graham Elwood, Jackie Kashian and Geoff Tate. The

foursome sat in the front row with microphones trading jokes as "Breaking Away" played on the Buskirk-Chumley's screen.

"Interrupting 'Breaking Away' in pretty much the exact spot where it was filmed was pretty thrilling," he said. "And Bloomington should be proud because that movie really holds up. We stopped making jokes during the bike race at the end because it's so exciting and brilliantly shot. But then we got big laughs pointing out how Cyril doesn't get any hugs from anyone after the big win. Poor Cyril!"

Thompson agreed it was one of the memories which remained most vivid from that first festival.

"The audience was just electric," he said.

This time around, Benson is taking on yet another archetypal local sports film, "Hoosiers."

"It will be very interesting to interrupt 'Hoosiers' this year because it's a much more serious movie and Gene Hackman is so great in it," he said. "At the very least it'll be cool to see another Indiana classic on the Buskirk-Chumley screen."

Thompson said he initially balked at the idea of cracking wise over such an iconic Hoosier film when Benson first proposed it two years ago.

“When he had the idea of doing ‘Hoosiers’ during the weekend, I was scared to death to tell you the truth,” he said. “I wanted to see how ‘Breaking Away’ would go. But, it couldn’t have gone better. It was so much fun.”

RFRA BLOWBACK?

As anyone who has paid even the least bit of attention to the news these past two weeks will know, the state has been embroiled in controversy over the March 26 signing of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act by Republican Gov. Mike Pence. After the week of white-hot outrage which ensued, lawmakers crafted an emergency fix for the law which explicitly included protections for LGBT Hoosiers. (Though, they still remain without protected class status in the state’s civil rights laws.)

In the meantime, a movement called Boycott Indiana took hold. The band Wilco first cancelled their upcoming Indianapolis show, only to see it rescheduled for the same date after the fix was signed by Pence. Native rocker John Mellencamp said he had considered cancelling an upcoming show, but had reconsidered at the last minute. Husband and wife actors and comedians Nick Offerman and Megan Mullally cancelled the slated Indianapolis stop on their upcoming comedy tour over the law.

“Thanks for reminding me, I’m cancelling my appearance at Limestone this year,” Benson joked. “Just kidding! I understand the idea behind the boycott

but it's not the people of Indiana who signed that thing. Boycott Mike Pence, I say! And you can quote me on that."

Thompson said he's not particularly worried over losing business despite the recent uproar. The choice of venues should be advertisement enough as to where their sympathies lie.

"What we're really seeing is we're being held hostage by someone who feels like this is something he needed to run for president," he said. "I don't really think we have very much to worry about as far as people boycotting the festival because of the decision of our governor. ... I think pretty much the word is out that Bloomington is not a part of it. The major shows of the festival are being held at the Buskirk-Chumley Theater, which has gay weddings on its premises before they were official ceremonies yet. One of the venues [The Back Door] is a gay bar. We're pretty well covered that we're against this."

Rob Burgess, Tribune night editor, may be reached by calling 765-454-8577, via email at rob.burgess@kokomotribune.com or on Twitter at twitter.com/robaburg.

IF YOU GO

WHAT: The Limestone Comedy Festival featuring Janeane Garofalo, Kyle Kinane, Doug Benson, Michael Che and many more comedians.

WHERE: Downtown Bloomington, multiple locations.

WHEN: June 4 to 6.

COST: VVIIPP (\$175) and VIP (\$125) badges are on sale now. General Admission (\$75) and Two-Day Badges (\$50) go on sale starting at noon Monday. A limited number of individual tickets for each Buskirk-Chumley Theater evening show will go on sale May 4th if the maximum number of festival badges are not sold. If the maximum number of badges are sold, there will be no individual tickets available for any shows.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Visit limestonefest.com.